Abu Shusha's Village Massacre

At dawn on 14 May 1948, on the eve of the end of the British Mandate, soldiers of the Haganah's Givati Brigade stormed the village of Abu Shusha southeast of Ramla, after a night of mortar shelling. After clashes with defenders from the village and neighboring villages, the soldiers killed about 60 of its people, among them women, children and elderly people, in the alleys and homes, blew up houses and water wells, and drove out those who remained. [1] [2] [3]

For many years the Abu Shusha massacre remained an "unknown massacre," until a mass grave containing 52 skeletons was uncovered in the village in 1995. [2] [3] This article tells the story of the village and the massacre, and the differences between sources over the number killed.

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The Abu Shusha massacre at a glance

Item	Details
Date	The night of 13–14 May 1948 [1] [4] [3]
Place	The village of Abu Shusha, about 8.5 kilometers southeast of Ramla [5]
Perpetrator	The Haganah's Givati Brigade, 51st and 54th battalions, in "Operation Barak" [1] [3]
Method	Mortar shelling, then storming and gunfire in alleys and homes, with houses and water wells blown up [1] [2]
Killed	About 60 according to WAFA and recent studies; 47 documented names according to palqura; more than 70 according to Arab sources [1] [4] [3]
Mass grave	Uncovered in 1995, containing 52 skeletons [3]
Expulsion	The remaining villagers were expelled on 21 May 1948 [3]

Abu Shusha: the village on the slope of Tell Jezer

Abu Shusha was a Palestinian village in the Ramla district, on the southern slope of Tell Jezer, about 8.5 kilometers southeast of the city of Ramla, where the coastal plain meets the foothills of the Jerusalem mountains. [5] [6] Tell Jezer is the site of the ancient Canaanite city of Gezer. [6]

It had 870 inhabitants in 1945, all of them Arabs. [5] Its houses were built of stone and mud, closely clustered, and it had a mosque, a few shops and a primary school founded in 1947, with 33 pupils enrolled. In 1944/1945, 2,475 dunums of its land were used for grain and 54 dunums for irrigated farming and orchards. [6]

The site of Abu Shusha and its olive trees. From the Abu Shusha page gallery on Palestinina.

The first raid: April 1948

In early April 1948, after a guard from a nearby settlement was killed, Haganah forces raided Abu Shusha, blowing up a house and a well. The Haganah's history describes the raid as "a model of a premeditated retaliatory operation," without mentioning the number of Arab victims. [6]

The massacre: 13–14 May 1948

On 13 May 1948 the people of Abu Shusha decided to stay in their village. [2] The defenders had about 70 rifles, some 20 of them almost unusable, one old Bren machine gun and a few mines. [2]

On the night of 13 May the mortar shelling of the village's houses and alleys

began. [5] [2] At dawn on 14 May, soldiers of the Givati Brigade, in “Operation Barak,” surrounded the village on all sides and showered it with bullets and shells, then advanced on it. [1] [2] The defenders from the village and neighboring villages resisted from trenches and fortifications, but the great imbalance of forces broke their lines. [1] [2]

The soldiers then entered the village and fired in every direction, in what was called the “clearing of the village.” People were killed in the alleys and homes; some by gunfire, some with axes, and some were lined up against walls. A thirteen-year-old boy was killed with an axe in front of his mother, and an elderly woman was killed because she refused to give up her two cows, her livelihood. [2] Many houses and water wells were mined and blown up. [1]

Hundreds of civilians were trapped with their livestock in a cave for about two days, until the soldiers found it and took out the women and children. [2] The dead were buried where they fell, without prayer, some covered only with earth, and some caves and trenches were used as mass graves. [2]

In the following days the Arab authorities in Ramla informed the Red Cross that the Jews had committed “barbaric acts” in Abu Shusha, and an Arab Legion unit reported on 19 May that “the Jews were killing villagers.” [3]

The entrance to the village of Abu Shusha, destroyed by occupation forces in 1948. From the Abu Shusha page gallery on Palestinina.

The ruins of Abu Shusha. From the Abu Shusha page gallery on Palestinina.

How many were killed?

Source	Number
Palestinian National Information Center (WAFA)	60 [1]
The book *The Village of Abu Shusha*	About 60, men, women, elderly people and children [2]
Encyclopedia of Palestinian Villages (palqura)	47 by name, 9 of them from the village of Saydun who were in Abu Shusha at the time [4]
Other Arab sources	More than 70 [3]
Givati Brigade's claim	30 [3]

The Encyclopedia of Palestinian Villages publishes the names of the victims it has been able to document, along with the names of ten wounded. [4] Among the dead were 9 people from Saydun who were in Abu Shusha at the time of the massacre. [4] Saydun was a depopulated village about 9 kilometers south of Ramla, occupied in early April 1948.

The mass grave

For many years the massacre remained unknown, known only from survivors' testimonies, until a mass grave containing 52 skeletons was uncovered in Abu Shusha in 1995. [3] The number roughly matches the villagers' accounts of the number killed, and their accounts of the victims being buried in caves and trenches where they fell. [2]

Expulsion and the village today

After the massacre most of the village's houses were blown up, and the remaining villagers were expelled on 21 May 1948. [3] [1] On the same day as the massacre, 14 May, the Givati Brigade also occupied the village of al-Na'ani, about 6

kilometers south of Ramla, and the next day the village of al-Qubab, about 10 kilometers southeast of Ramla, fell.

Today the settlement of Amelim, founded in 1948, stands on most of the village site, and the settlement of Pedaya was built in 1951 on part of the village's land. Fig, cypress and cactus still grow on the site, along with a single palm tree. [6]

The overgrown site of Abu Shusha, and the settlement built on its land. From the Abu Shusha page gallery on Palestinina.

Read about Ramla and its depopulated villages and the Zionist massacres against the Palestinian people.

Conclusion

The people of Abu Shusha decided to stay in their village, and they paid the price: a night of shelling, then an assault in which about 60 of them were killed in the alleys and homes and buried where they fell. Their massacre remained unknown

for nearly half a century, until the earth itself gave up 52 skeletons from a mass grave, a witness to what happened on the slope of Tell Jezer in May 1948.

Frequently asked questions about the Abu Shusha massacre

When did the Abu Shusha massacre take place?

It took place on the night of 13–14 May 1948: the shelling began on the night of 13 May, and the village was stormed at dawn on 14 May.

Where is the village of Abu Shusha?

Abu Shusha is a depopulated village in the Ramla district, on the southern slope of Tell Jezer, about 8.5 kilometers southeast of Ramla.

Who carried out the Abu Shusha massacre?

It was carried out by the Haganah’s Givati Brigade, in “Operation Barak.”

How many people were killed in the Abu Shusha massacre?

About 60 according to most Palestinian sources, 47 by documented name, and more than 70 according to other Arab sources. In 1995 a mass grave containing 52 skeletons was uncovered.

What is the difference between Abu Shusha in Ramla and Abu Shusha in Haifa?

They are two different villages: Abu Shusha in the Ramla district, where the massacre took place, and Abu Shusha in the Haifa district. There is also Ghuwayr Abu Shusha in the Tiberias district.

Sources and references

Arabic-language sources are listed with translated titles.

1. “Israeli Massacres,” Palestinian National Information Center (WAFA).
2. Tariq Yassin, “Abu Shusha and the Unknown Massacre” (from the book *The Village of Abu Shusha* in the Destroyed Palestinian Villages series), Palestine Remembered.
3. “Abu Shusha massacre,” English Wikipedia (for comparison).
4. “The Abu Shusha Massacre,” Encyclopedia of Palestinian Villages (palqura).
5. “Abu Shusha,” Palestinina.
6. “Historical Overview of the Village of Abu Shusha from *All That Remains*” (Walid Khalidi), Palestine Remembered.